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ABSTRACT

Family Message journals, notebooks in which first-graders write a message to their families and receive a family reply each day, provide a fertile context for instruction and practice in writing for real-world functions and authentic audiences. Observation of classroom instruction, qualitative analysis of case-study children's and families' messages, and interviews with children and family members revealed how children developed a functional perspective on writing and audience awareness. Evidence of audience awareness included growth in children's recognition and use of rhetorical and conventional strategies and constraints, as demonstrated in their writing processes and products. Both teachers and family members played important instructional roles. Results suggest that real functions and audiences are central to student ownership of writing and that explicit instruction and clearly delineated assignments may enhance young students' power as writers, rather than limiting their sense of control and engagement. (Contains 3 tables of data and 63 references.) (Author/NKA)

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Writing for Real-World Functions and Audiences in Family Message Journals: New Insights into Writing Instruction

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Abstract

Family Message Journals, notebooks in which first-graders write a message to their families and receive a family reply each day, provide a fertile context for instruction and practice in writing for real-world functions and authentic audiences. Observation of classroom instruction, qualitative analysis of case-study children's and families' messages, and interviews with children and family members reveal how children developed a functional perspective on writing and audience awareness. Evidence of audience awareness included by growth in children's recognition and use of rhetorical and conventional strategies and constraints, as demonstrated in their writing processes and products. Both teachers and family members played important instructional roles. Results suggest that real functions and audiences are central to student ownership of writing and that explicit instruction and clearly delineated assignments may enhance young students' power as writers, rather than limiting their sense of control and engagement.

Writing for Real-World Functions and Audiences in Family Message Journals: New Insights into Writing Instruction

Dear mom Did you know that a spietr is a vapier [vampire] caus it suks the Boold [blood] from inceks [insects] two are poson [poison] some are red purple spider do not have wing spiter have two body parts Male spider are smaller than femals love Kyle

This message is one of nearly 130 Kyle wrote in his Family Message Journal over the course of his first-grade year. Opening with a challenge ("Did you know ") and a joking comparison to vampires, he seeks to engage and inform his audience. Family Message Journals are notebooks in which children write a message to their families each day, and a family member (or if necessary, another adult aside from the classroom teacher) writes a reply. Topics, genres and functions of children's messages are assigned in conjunction with curriculum-related activities, or the need to inform families about school events. For example, children write hypotheses and observations before and during a science experiment; they recall information from a lesson on local history; they design persuasive arguments for recycling at home; they retell or write a personal responses to a story; or they request bag lunches and volunteer chaperones for a class trip.

Because messages are about classroom activities families do not experience, they serve as genuine communication of ideas, knowledge and needs, unknown to their audience. Children carry full responsibility for the communicative value of their

messages; teachers never write in these journals.

This paper examines how Family Message Journals provided a fertile context for instruction and practice in writing for real-world functions and an authentic audience, in two first-grade classrooms, over the course of one year.

Theoretical Framework

Several strands of research intertwine to illuminate how Family Message Journals can help children recognize what writing can do for them, and that its functional success depends on engaging and satisfying readers: Research on writing development and instruction, the relationship between writing to learn and learning to write, and family involvement in schooling.

Writing Development

Young children need ongoing opportunities to experiment with print and express their ideas in writing (Bissex, 1980; Calkins, 1994; Cambourne, 1988; Clay, 1975; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Temple, Nathan, Burris & Temple, 1988). Further, to discover what writing can accomplish in the world, and how to communicate clearly, children need to write for an audience outside the classroom and for functions of everyday life (Hall, 1998; Neumann & Roskos, 1991; Ryder, Lei & Roen, 1999). Knowing that their writing has the power to communicate to others and accomplish goals, engages children in writing and challenges them to work at writing well (Calkins, 1994; Edelsky, Altwerger & Flores, 1991; Routman, 1991).

The potential of writing's power, however, lies in

successfully anticipating audience perspectives and needs (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Frank, 1992; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Kreeft, 1984; Langer, 1986; Ryder et al., 1999). It is natural for children not to be aware of whether their writing will communicate to others as intended (Britton, 1970; Temple, et al., 1988). They have to learn that unlike speech events, with speakers and listeners present, written text is relatively decontextualized. When children are writing about school activities, the teacher or peers may not constitute a real audience-- they already know. Families, however, are a more authentic audience, in need of writing that is clear enough to communicate what happened if you weren't there. Sharing their writing with families capitalizes on children's desire to communicate with others (King & Rentel, 1979), by providing feedback on message clarity and effect (Calkins, 1994; Harste et al., 1984; Temple et al., 1988).

Writing Instruction

Practice writing for real purposes and audiences is essential, but introduction to new topics, forms and functions for writing, and growth in audience awareness, may require careful guidance (Ryder et al., 1999). Teachers help children move beyond what they **can** do, and **choose** to do on their own as writers (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Cazden, 1988; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Rogoff & Gardner, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976).

Teacher topic choice is a natural result of using writing

across the curriculum, as a tool for remembering, thinking and learning specific content. Additionally, teachers who provide explicit instruction and practice in applying genre characteristics make new forms, appropriate to different disciplines and functions accessible to children (Christie, 1985, 1986; Pappas & Pettegrew, 1998; Schleppegrell, 1998). Knowing the right genre to use in a situation, and knowing how to use it enhances children's communicative power. Because "genres are basically social actions," forms which make possible "social processes of communication," genre and function are linked (Cooper, 1999, pp. 26-27). Family Message Journals involve genres typically privileged in school (e.g. narrative, essay) but also include many examples of text types and functions pervasive in the world outside school-- messages often organize, instruct, request, persuade, or recall (Hall, 1998).

If teachers do not intervene to provide direct instruction in writing, student experimentation with topic, genre and function may be haphazard or nonexistent (Cooper, 1999). Yet, balancing teachers' responsibility for intervention with student ownership is "complicated" (Dudley-Marling, 1997). When assigned topics and genres are used to do writing **for genuine functions and audiences**, student ownership may grow out of the fact that the writing will be read by and will inform others, and that immediate response is forthcoming. Children may care about their writing because it communicates and compels response, not simply because they select what to write about, why, and in what form.

Writing to Learn and Learning to Write

Writing can be a powerful learning tool. Recording ideas slows down thought processes and invites students to step back to consider what they have learned and what questions remain. Writing also nudges them to articulate, shape and organize ideas in their own words (Atwell, 1987, 1989; Avery, 1987; Britton, 1970; Emig, 1977; Fulwiler, 1982, 1987; Hancock, 1993; Wollman-Bonilla, 1991; Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995, 1999), and to connect background knowledge and beliefs to new information, making personal sense of it (Martin, D'Arcy, Newton & Parker, 1976; Mayher & Lester, 1983).

Writing to learn is typically viewed as "expressive" or "exploratory," with the focus on getting ideas down on paper and generating more ideas (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod & Rosen, 1975). Revision and editing are considered more appropriate to writing destined for formal presentation. Family Message Journal writing integrates expressive, personal writing with more formal, explicit writing for an audience, reflecting attention to genre structure and linguistic conventions. Family Message Journal entries are a context for children to work outward towards writing as it is structured for various functions, in various disciplines, by venturing away from the comfortable territory of expressive writing, without losing its generative and reflective power (Britton et al., 1975). The intended audience's absence from the classroom forces some degree of clarity, detail, organization and convention. As children are writing to learn in

Family Message Journals, they are simultaneously learning to write in fuller, clearer ways and in a range of forms, creating a bridge to formal writing (Kreeft, 1984).

Family Involvement in Children's School Learning

Involving families in flexible, convenient and respectful ways boosts children's academic development and school performance (Cairney & Munsie, 1995; Epstein, 1991; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Quint, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989). Research shows that it is a myth "that parents do not take an active interest in their child's schooling" (Fact and Fiction, 1997/98, p. 7). Regardless of income, ethnicity or culture, most families are interested in fostering their children's educational success (Baumann & Thomas, 1997; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Mulhern, 1997; Quint, 1994; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Not only do families need to be informed about school activities so they can discuss and support classroom content and practices at home, teachers must also elicit families' participation in school curriculum and learning (Rosenholtz, 1989). Teachers need to build partnerships with families, creating conditions where students and the teacher can **learn from** the children's families. Teachers promote participation when they make clear to families how much their involvement is valued, and the specific ways in which they can participate as partners (Epstein, 1986, 1991; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Families need to know exactly **how** they are being

invited to help, why their participation is important, and how they can be effective in promoting children's school learning (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Family participation that involves authentic learning from families capitalizes on their knowledge and reflects faith that they can contribute substantively to the curriculum (Cairney & Munsie, 1995; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Shockley, Michalove & Allen, 1995). Like teachers, families can scaffold school learning-- guiding children to know, understand and do what they cannot yet accomplish on their own or have not yet been introduced to (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Cazden, 1988; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Rogoff & Gardner, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976).

The Present Study

The present study describes what happened when children wrote in Family Message Journals, on assigned, curriculum-related topics and genres, for specific functions, and families were expected to reply in writing to each message. The majority of studies on children's writing are observations of their processes, choices, and natural growth; we know little about how "specific instructional strategies . . . [influence] students' development as writers" (Dahl & Farnan, 1998, p. 21). This study explores the impact of teacher instruction and family feedback on children's message writing.

Part of a larger study of Family Message Journals (Wollman-Bonilla, in press), the focus of this paper is the functions of

children's writing and the attendant growth in audience awareness. Although thought to be important, little is known about how audience awareness develops or is evidenced in young children's writing.

This paper addresses three questions:

1) What were the functions of children's messages?

2) How was audience awareness manifested in their messages?

3) How did their teachers and families help the first-graders develop a functional perspective and audience awareness?

Method

Setting and Participants

The two first-grade classrooms are in a suburban Boston elementary school enrolling about 530 children. Though primarily Anglo, the student body includes about 7% African Americans, 3% Asians and 2% Latina/os. Most students come from middle-class backgrounds, but working- and upper middle-class children are well-represented. In 1996-97 students in the first-grade classrooms reflected the school's ethnic and socio-economic make-up, and included special needs children receiving various services.

The teachers emphasized classroom community, sharing and helping others. Families were considered an essential part of the community, and family involvement was part of the classrooms' culture. Nearly 50% of female parents and guardians served as regular volunteers in the classroom, homework usually involved families, and Family Message Journals were central to the

literacy curriculum. The teachers explained to families the value of writing back to children in these journals, and used frequent letters to remind families that their participation was important and that a nightly response to the content of the child's message was expected. They reassured families that mastery of written English wasn't necessary. The teachers' clear expectation of involvement, regardless of families' educational backgrounds, was effective. Only 2 families of 48 failed to reply regularly in the journal.

Four case-study children-- Kristen, Kyle, Maryanne, and Sara-- were selected because they represented the full range of writing ability in the first-grade. These three girls and one boy ranged in age from five to seven over the course of the school year. Two were emergent readers and writers, and two were beginning readers and writers as the school year opened. All of the children lived in families with two working parents in occupations ranging from construction work to investment banking; they represented the socio-economic diversity of their classroom. Maryanne's family is bilingual; her parents and older sister immigrated from Poland prior to her birth. Each of the case-study children has at least one sibling; an older sibling served as correspondent in two of the four Family Message Journals.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Data include field notes from weekly participant-observation in one classroom from October through May; interviews with the two teachers, four students, and four sets of parents; the four

case-study students' year-long corpus of journal messages and their families' replies (524 messages and 512 replies total); and related artifacts from the classroom, including letters sent home to parents regarding Family Message Journals and other activities and expectations, a weekly class newsletter, and materials used in conjunction with the study of message topics.

The children's journal messages formed the key pieces of data, and were analyzed by coding for emergent patterns (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Analysis focused on personal and academic purposes, topic, genre, and message function vis-a-vis the writer's audience. Initial pattern analysis revealed that Halliday's (1975) functional categories for oral language were useful for describing the particular functions of writing which children were taught and used in writing messages. Messages were subsequently coded according to these functions, as one category of analysis, which is a focus of this paper. In some messages, multiple functions were integrated; about 5% of the 524 total messages were categorized as serving two functions.

Comparative analysis of features of messages' rhetorical content (e.g. leads, level of explanation, persuasive devices) and conventions (e.g. format, cohesion, spelling) was used to determine how children's writing changed over time. Such changes were then examined in light of the function(s) of each message and how function might spur improvement in written products.

Providing triangulation with the collection of messages were my observations of the teachers' instruction, and of children's

processes and attitudes regarding message writing and reading replies from home, as well as the teachers', children's and families' interview interpretations of the experience.

Results

Functions of Children's Messages

Children's messages were similar to oral language in their conversational, interactive nature. Halliday's (1975) category system for the functions of oral language was a "good fit" for describing how each of the messages functioned. Table 1 represents the percentage of messages in each category and an example of each.

‹Insert Table 1 about here›

Informing Families

About half of Family Message Journal assignments involved informing families. For example, as part of a unit on owls Sara wrote:

> Whoo whoo Family,
>
> owls mite eat mice, fish, snakes, rabbits, and even skunks!
>
> Do you know why owl does not mind the smell of skunks? I do

Family Message Journals positioned children as "experts" who knew things their families did not. Informative messages typically included some claim of expertise. For example, one of Kyle's entries began: "I know when Hurkans come . . . " Rhetorical questions, like Maryanne's "Interesting facts, huy?" also revealed children's sense of having important and engaging information to share.

Families' replies usually confirmed that children's messages were having the intended effect. For example: "Dear Maryanne, I have learned something new from you today. That groundhog and woodchuck are two different names for the same animal . . . "

Getting Things from Families

Twelve percent of messages involved persuading families to fulfill a special request. The first-graders discovered that a written message may get more attention than an oral plea, and that writing helped them organize and remember their ideas, so they developed strong arguments for what they wanted.

Early persuasive messages were simply requests with the word "please." For example: "MAY I PlEese GeT . . . " Over time, they grew more complex. Sara asked to earn money to buy the books she wanted ("I want to clean the dishes for you only if you pay me"), and offered to spend some of her own "alouens [allowance] money," as well. When Kristen's class was planning a spelling activity she wrote: "I need 4 words To do for spelling baseball what do you think cod be good can you help me please it will be fun" She tried to get her family's help by arguing that it would be "fun" to generate words, and further encouraged them by drawing four lines for them to fill in.

Such messages were common because the teachers gave first-graders responsibility for communicating with their families about special opportunities and events, and persuading them to participate or contribute. Often families' replies explicitly stated how convincing a message was; children's success with

messages intended to get things demonstrated writing's power.

Interacting with Families

About 10 percent of messages were used primarily to interact with families-- to define, develop and sustain relationships. Some of these messages focused on shared memories and feelings about activities enjoyed together, some were thank-you notes expressing appreciation for a special experience, and others told a family member what she or he meant to the child writer. For example:

> Dear Daddy,
>
> Fathers day is coming up. You could reseve a littl somthing! You are the best dad in the world! You are Dinamic, brave, and funny.

Another type of interactional message involved asking family members for their opinions. Maryanne asked her family: "how douse sharing make you feel? do you like to share?" In reply, her mother wrote: "Yes, I like sharing. But when I was little I liked everything for myself. Now I like to share and to give . . . " Such conversations-on-paper helped the first-graders see writing as a tool for interaction and maintenance of relationships.

Figuring Things Out with Families

The first-graders used about 10 percent of their messages to explore ideas or ask questions of their families in an effort to solve a problem or find out about something. When Kyle's teacher challenged her students to figure out how she could pick up a cup

without touching it, they used their Family Message Journals to think about the problem: "can Mrs. carolan pick up a cup without tuching it she could ty [tie] a Big not [knot] in The cup and put The not and put the string Threw The Top and pull The string." Kyle's mother replied that Kyle's idea might work; other families suggested trying children's solutions at home. Families' replies supported and sometimes aided the process of problem solving.

Sharing Personal Ideas and Feelings with Families

About 8 percent of messages functioned primarily to express children's ideas and feelings. Reflecting on a year-end athletic event, Maryanne communicated her displeasure with her mother: "Field day was so much fun! But verry swety and hot! A verry good thing I brought my water bottle. You came late and left erly I'm not happy about it."

Children also wrote about positive feelings:

Dear Family

my favoret thing was the balloon toss and the tugawar we all shoad good sportmenship and I really like the tugawar because felicia couldn't hold on tight and I couldn't pull hard enaf [enough] and Mrs. Carolan said it looked like water skeeing and Mrs. McKay and Mrs. Carolan hid a balloon intile [until] they could drop it on Mr. Dulay and when they did it went on his neck then Mrs. Walenscie put a water balloon in Mr. Dulay's hat and when he put his hat on it went on his head every body thawt it was funny Love Sara

Writing allowed Sara to share her pleasure at watching her gym teacher tricked by the first-grade teachers.

Regulating Families' Behavior

About 6% of the first-graders' messages told families to do things. These messages were more directive than persuasive. Some were simple reminders to provide money for a field trip, but others were requests that families change their behavior. After several lessons on automobile safety, Maryanne wrote:

> Buckle up!!! Mom and Dad
>
> Please put Me in the back seat it's the safest playse in the car. DON'T!!! drink alcohol befor driveing you Will get drunk and you might get in a car acksedent. Allways buckle Me up buckle your self up to. Dont drive when you are verry verry verry verry old. Don't drive when the wether is bad.
>
> Love, Maryanne

The reply message reinforced writing's regulatory power, assuring Maryanne that her family would follow these rules.

Creating an Imagined Textual Experience for Families

About 4% of messages created an imagined textual experience for families. These stories were usually written as a series of journal entries and the children could gauge the impact of their ideas on readers who would respond, as in a writing conference.

During a unit on mice, the first-graders composed "mouse tale" messages. Maryanne's first message read: "many years ago In a byuteeful medo ther was a mouse naemed gaby. the medo haed a . . . . . streem the streem was Verea clean weth fish." Her

family replied with interest, eager to find out what would happen to Gaby. Maryanne continued the story:

> Gaby had a frend naemd Gordana Gaby and Gordana lovd to play together taye [they] like to play gayms like tage and hide and go squeek It was fun just then tay saw a cat! you cat! thay shreekt iff that cat cachis us that wolde [would] be the ende of us quiklee thay hed [hid]

Her family's reply to this second installment provided specific feedback on how successfully Maryanne had captured their interest in what would happen next, and suggested some possible endings.

Appropriating a Functional Perspective

The first-grade teachers designed Family Message Journal assignments to introduce students to a range of "real-world," everyday functions of writing. However, the children were able to use their messages to achieve their own functions, as well as those their teachers intended. Appropriating and capitalizing on the functional aspect of their Family Message Journals, they integrated requests for a pet into message assignments focused on sharing information about animals, or used messages about special school events to express anger because a family member could not attend. The children were not limited by the functions their teachers had in mind when they designed assignments. Rather, the teachers' intentions revealed the many possibilities for messages to help students accomplish their own goals.

How Audience Awareness Was Manifested

When children have a real purpose for writing they want

their messages to function as intended, and naturally focus on audience-impact. Once the first-graders began to recognize what writing could do for them, and to get replies which reinforced its potential power, they began to pay increasing attention to the content and form of their messages. This attention was evident both as they wrote and in their final products.

Messages were analyzed for changes which might provide evidence of growth in audience awareness. Close comparison of multiple messages over time was feasible since all were in essentially the same format-- letters to family members. Growth in audience awareness was manifested in various aspects of the children's writing: rhetorical content, and use of text-level, sentence-level, and word-level conventions (see Table 2).

‹Insert Table 2 about here›

Rhetorical Content

The content of children's messages reflected growing awareness that their writing was a form of interaction with readers. Evidence of this awareness included increasing attention to grabbing readers' notice. For example, Sara began a message about the cruelty of caging wild animals with an attention-getting question: "would you like to be cept in a cage?"

Many families included questions to the first-graders in their replies, but the children only began to answer these consistently toward the end of the year. The notable increase in responses to families' questions was another indication of

children's awareness of the dialogic nature of the message exchange, and a writer's responsibility to his or her audience.

More frequent embedding of questions within their messages also reflected the first-graders' sense of interacting with readers through writing. For example (italics added):

> Dear Family I know Spring is comeing because pusywillows are evrywher we are growing some in out classroom. It is getting warmer evryday *did you knowtiss?* I remember we have flowers growing in our garden *do you remember?* . . .

Maryanne's speaks directly to her audience.

Another sign of audience-awareness was increasing topical clarity in messages. Early in the year when requesting particular books from book club order forms that were regularly distributed in school, Maryanne began her messages: "I want to get . . . " or "Can I please get . . ." But her later messages revealed awareness that it would help if she told her family **what** she was writing about first: "I have a book ortor. these are the books Ied like ples. . ." Similarly, Sara learned to open with an indication of what her entry was about, and then develop her message to share all that she had learned: "We are talking about frogs we got a Weekly Reader about frogs and Scientists have discovered a frog it is littler than most frogs and we learned about how they grow . . . " Messages with clearly identified topics reflected understanding that written texts should be able to stand alone, without the author present to explain.

Audience awareness was also evident in the children's developing skills at elaboration. Over time, they grew better at writing everything they needed to in order to fully explain what they had learned. Consider a November message from Kyle which read simply: "The Indians planted corn," in comparison with a message written in March: "owls look wise B[ut] the are not as smart as crows or blue Jays Before it hatchs a Baby owl has an egg Tooth The tooth is on it's Beak. The BaBy uses The Tooth t crack The shell of the egg." Kyle provides a relatively thorough accounting of how a baby owl gets out of its shell.

Another aspect of audience awareness is the provision of evidence to support one's statements and achieve readers' trust. An example from Kristen's journal is typical:

> Dear Family,
>
> We saw a isebly [assembly] And got to see a frog And all kinds of snacse And we got to tuch soem Animalls I loved it. it was grate And We got to see a aligater And a trtle And we Liked it I wish you cud see the hole thing Becaus it was awsom that's why I liked it I Bet you wud to And the man was nise and youed love it And my favorite was the afrcen Bull Dog and the Boa cinstructer can not hear And it smells with it's nose Love Kristen P.S I Love you

Kristen included many reasons to support her assertion that the presentation was "grate" and "awsom"-- she saw and touched many reptiles, the presenter was nice, and she learned some interesting information.

The use of increasingly sophisticated persuasion techniques was also a sign of growing audience awareness. Such techniques were evident in messages on a variety of topics, but commonly appeared as requests for pets in entries about animals. When Kristen's class learned about newborn kittens she wrote:

> Meow mom And dad
> a kitten stase with thier mother for 6 manths after thier born And a kitten do not open thier eyes intill thier ten monse old that's why I wont a kitten I'll die for one Love Kristen p.s But I Know I'm algec [allergic] to them Mom I Don't mind if i'm lirgeck To them I gest [just] wont one Plese Plese with a chere on top I wont one I beg you plese plese plese I wont one so much beaus they are so cyoot [cute] Plese mom I love you
> I wont a kitten so Bad if you say no I'll die But I Bet I know you wont care arent I rite you are the Best mom if you say yes so plese say yes I'll Do ene [any] Thing I promis I Bet your tirD of reDing so I'll stop

This message provides a remarkable contrast with a persuasive message written a few months earlier, asking to attend a school play: "I wan't to go so much to the play I'll be sad if you say no." In the kitten message Kristen seems more conscious of her readers, trying a **set** of strategies she thinks may persuade: arousing sympathy for a newborn kitten, explaining that she would "die for one," anticipating and addressing a potential objection (her allergies), pleading (pretty please with a cherry on top),

including reasoning to support her wish ("they are so cute"), arousing guilt ("I know you won't care . . ."), flattery ("Mom, I love you . . . You are the best mom"), and offering to reciprocate ("I'll do anything, I promise").

As the year progressed, the first-graders composed increasingly persuasive messages. Offers to help or to sacrifice to get what they wanted became more common as they found that this was an effective technique with their audience.

Text-level Conventions

Growing audience awareness was also evident when I traced the use of text-level conventions over the course of the year. Messages reflected developing recognition that if genre and format expectations were met, and messages were pencilled neatly, they would be more comprehensible. Teacher and family reminders that some messages were difficult to read and could not be appreciated helped to promote this consciousness.

One example of growing facility with genre conventions was original stories. Compare two by Maryanne, written almost three months apart:

> (December Story) Ther once was a playn old show [shoe] who wanted too be special the show was naemed Joanna whent to the pant shope it jumped in too soum pant and ran back too the show shope Joanna talked to the auther [other] show's then a littel girl came by and buaut [bought] the show and Joanna had a awsam laghf
>
> (March story) Last year Pickles the cute and little kitten

was at the pet shop. the neighbors dog was looking in the window Pickles was scard she un locked her cayg and juumed out and ran out the door climed up a tree. the dog barcked and barcked and finely gave up. Pickles climed down. Pickles ran to Pogos house. Pogo was Pickles identickal twin. back with the neighbor Brus the dog sliped out of his colar and went after the kittys. Soon he met up with them. Quickly the two cats ran home. When ther owners found them at the door they quickly let them in. they scureyed up the stairway and ran down the hall. ther sleepy roo [room] was behind the door. the door was clowsed scintc [since] they could not owpen it all by them selvs they hade to asck ther owner too owpen it, by meyowing. Ther owner owpened the door and Pogo and pickles saw Pixie and Pete on ther bed. Pixie and Pete wock [woke] up and welcomed them in, and all four kittens fell asleep with sweet dreams. The end

Whereas the reader does not know that the first story begins in a shoe store until the end, Maryanne's second story opens with an introduction to the setting, time, and main character. Both stories include the language of literature, the first beginning with "There was once," but the second story does so more consistently. Maryanne carefully chose words and phrases she did not use in everyday conversation, but which characterize "book language," such as "scurried," "welcomed them in," and "all four kittens fell asleep with sweet dreams."

The second story also reflects growing awareness of how to

construct a fully developed plot with a real problem that creates tension, and a satisfying resolution. Maryanne also created internal consistency, explaining how the dog got free and how the kittens got the door open. The second story does not end until the kittens' problem is solved and we know what happens to them; the first one asks readers to simply accept that Joanna had an "awesome life."

All of the children grew in their ability to use genre conventions familiar to their audience. Kristen, for example, wrote a story about a gingerbread woman baked by a man who needed a wife. The plot unfolds as a series of narrow escapes for the clever woman who is almost eaten for lunch. This story embodies traditional fairy tale motifs: three untrustworthy characters, three attempts at escape, talking animals, a countryide setting, and multiple interpretations of the question: "Do you want to stay for lunch?" Similar growth was observed in children's non-fiction writing. Above, I discussed children's developing use of conventions of essayist writing such as providing evidence for their statements, as in Kristen's "reptile assembly" message, or organizing information to explain, step-by step, how something happens, as in Kyle's "egg tooth" message.

Children also began to regularly follow conventions of letter format. By the second half of the year most children began to consistently included a date, use a salutation, start a new line, sometimes even indenting the first line of the message itself, and end with a closing. These changes brought messages

closer to readers' expectations for a letter, making the messages easier to read.

A final text-level convention that is important when communicating through print is handwriting. Though children's handwriting varied somewhat from message to message, clear trends were evident, as demonstrated by comparing any two of the same child's entries written even a month apart, as well as by observing the care they took while writing. Over the course of the year, all of the first-graders paid increasing attention to forming letters correctly, keeping the size of their writing consistent within a message, leaving space between letters and words, starting a new line as needed, and writing on the line. This growth contributed to legibility, which helps readers.

Sentence-level Conventions

Sentence-level conventions include punctuation and lexical links to create cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Kolln, 1999). It is important to remember that messages were not formally edited, so they may not reflect children's full knowledge of syntactic and mechanical conventions. Nevertheless, the first-graders were expected to re-read each entry to make sure it would be clear, and were encouraged to add punctuation to aid their readers. As a bridge from informal to formal writing, composed for an audience that will rely on some degree of conventionality for understanding, messages demonstrated children's developing mastery of conventions.

Sara's Family Message Journal is typical in reflecting

growing ability to use the basics-- periods, question marks, and exclamation marks-- more consistently and correctly. At the beginning of the year Sara rarely used punctuation, and when she did she placed a period between every word. By December, she remembered periods most of the time, and capital letters sometimes, as in the following retelling from Lobel (1971): "The first chapter was about toad. and He had lawts uv thing to do. Soa he roat a list. and it floo away latre. mi favrite one wus the gardin one. toad shoutid at the seeds."

The first-graders also grew in their use of more advanced punctuation such as commas and hyphens. In Kristen's "gingerbread woman" story, for example, she twice used a hyphen to tie "ginger" on one line to "bread" on the next. Her spotty use of sophisticated punctuation was typical, but this was a big step from early messages where rather than using hyphens, she tried to squeeze a whole word onto a line, making it illegible.

Having learned to punctuate in the context of writing for an audience, when asked at year's end, the children could explain the specific function of each punctuation mark they used, and the general purpose of punctuation to help readers understand and appreciate messages' content (Calkins, 1994; Wilde, 1992).

Messages also reflected growth in understanding the need for cohesion across sentences. Readers need to know how sentences and ideas are linked or a message seems disconnected and confusing. Sara's "frog and toad" message, above, exemplifies the confusion caused by lack of cohesion: "And it flew away

later," with "it" referring to the list toad made for himself, is followed by "And my favorite one was the garden one." It is not clear what "one" refers to, nor how this sentence relates to the previous one. A reader is left wondering if Sara is referring to the list, to a different event in the chapter, or to a different chapter.

Later in the year, Sara, like most of her classmates, grew far more attentive to using cohesive ties. In a message about dinosaurs, for example, she guided her readers, helping them follow her train of thought by using cohesive devices such as repetition of the word "dinosaurs," and pronouns which clearly refer to specific proper nouns:

> Did you know that their is a bigger dinosaur then T. rex? it's name is Carcharodontosaurus did you know their wusent any one airowned wen the dinosaurs wer alive? not even cave men their wer ol difirint cindse of dinosaurs their was tuiranasoris rex and T. rex and Carcharodontosaurus but I thingk their is a dinosaur named Pachecephylosaurus and their wer much more cindse of dinosaurs . . .

Sara structured her message to indicate that the first "it's" refers to "T. rex;" when she changed the subject to the absence of cave men, she explicitly marked that she was coming back to dinosaurs in the next sentence: "their wer ol difirint cindse of dinosaurs." Typically, earlier in the year she would have simply written "their wer ol difirint cindse" which would refer, grammatically, to "cave men," confusing readers.

As the first-graders developed awareness of the need to use cohesive devices (spurred sometimes by families' expressions of confusion when reading messages), their messages became easier to read-- it took less work to figure out what they meant.

Word-level Conventions

The first-graders also grew to appreciate that conventional spelling eases communication, enhancing audience comprehension. At the beginning of the year, all of the children were either pre-phonetic or semi-phonetic spellers, writing only some of the sounds in a word (Wilde, 1992). Over time, messages demonstrated gradual movement towards consistent phonetic spelling-- all sounds were represented as articulated. By early spring, many children worked hard at using visual memory of spellings as well as phonetic strategies, recognizing that this enhanced readability for their audience.

Classroom observation also demonstrated that the first-graders paid increasing attention to spelling as they were writing, developing a variety of spelling strategies, such as writing a word several ways to see what looked right, working out a problem with a peer, or using a textual resource. Simply recognizing that words might be spelled wrong, and that this would make a difference to their readers, was a big step in audience awareness.

Developing a Functional Perspective and Audience Awareness

It seems self-evident that children will think harder about what and how they write when they are writing for real functions

and readers whose reactions they care about. However, concern with audience awareness was not simply a result of having the **opportunity** to write to a real audience for real functions. Both teachers and families deliberately provided guidance in how to write clearly and effectively for various purposes (see Table 3).

<Insert Table 3 about here>

The first-grade teachers assigned messages to introduce the many functions of writing, and they provided direct instruction in how to achieve these. One form of direct instruction was demonstration-- composing messages in front of the children to make public their decision-making about form and content. For example, one teacher asked herself, "What are all the things I could write about the experiment we did?" The children brainstormed ideas, discussed each suggestion and, with teacher guidance, decided upon what might be "most important to tell someone who wasn't in the classroom." Next, the teacher wondered aloud about how to format her message so it would seem familiar to her audience and be easy to read. "I'll make it like a letter!" she exclaimed. "You know, like the messages they sometimes get in the mail, or you bring home from school." She went on to discuss the layout for "friendly letters."

Other brief lessons were devoted to genre and format conventions used for different functions, always with audience impact in mind. For example, students watched and listened as their teacher thought about the best way to word a message in which she was trying to get something. Should she simply ask,

demand or persuade, or state **why** it's needed? Which was likely to be most effective? On another day she demonstrated how to format, organize, and word a brief "lab report" on a science experiment involving apples, a poem about apples, and a message recalling a trip to an orchard.

The teachers also wrote messages which were missing crucial information, had no capital letters or punctuation, or sloppy handwriting, and asked the students for help with improving them so they would better communicate to readers.

A second approach to direct instruction took the form of "instructional tips" that were reviewed frequently. One tip was to read over a message before taking it home, to be sure it was clear and complete, and make needed changes. Another tip, introduced mid-year, was that every message should include "at least three specific pieces of information," as opposed to common, general statements such as "it is cool."

A third form of direct instruction was one-on-one feedback as children were writing and after. Gauged to their sense of children's readiness, the teachers challenged them to think more about their audience, asking questions such as: "What does your family have to know about the experiment?" "Is it okay if you forget to tell them it involved apples?" "Will your message still be clear?" They also encouraged elaboration, saying: "You can write more," "Let's see if you can write to the bottom of the page," or "Try to go on to the back."

Finally, the teachers provided direct instruction when the

children shared their message and their families' replies in the classroom, using these as further examples for discussion of how clear, convincing writing can function to get things done, influence others, share ideas and experiences, and get feedback.

Though lessons related to audience awareness and how it enhances writing's functional success may have been taught weeks and months earlier, strategies for meeting readers' needs seemed to stick with the children and lead to steady growth in message form and content. This is probably because the first-graders were constantly applying these lessons, writing daily for an "outside" audience.

Like the teachers' instruction, families' replies also encouraged development of audience awareness and reinforced a functional perspective on writing. First, they indicated attention to what the children wrote, stating that the messages had impacted their thinking and behavior. Many replies included comments like "Thanks for the information. I did not know that," or "Yes, we can do that."

Second, replies often included requests for elaboration, such as, "I would like to know more about spelling baseball." Such statements suggested ways in which the first-graders might elaborate in future writing to satisfy readers' curiosity.

A third way in which families brought readers' needs to children's consciousness was by asking specific questions when the information provided in a message left them wondering. For example, Sara's father replied to a message about dried pine cone

seeds: "What happens to the seeds after they scatter on the ground?" Showing that readers may have questions when the information provided is incomplete developed children's awareness of how writers meet audience needs.

Finally, some family replies modeled elaboration, demonstrating how to include enough information to satisfy readers and achieve the intended function. For example, replying to her daughter's discovery that the main street in her town "was named after President Washington," Maryanne's mother explained at length:

> To give a person's name to a place, a street, or a building is very popular in the world. Most often these people did something very important and GOOD for their country or for all the people in the world (like finding a medicine for some illnesses). . .

Though not every family consistently wrote replies that modeled elaboration, all of the first-graders were introduced to such models when the children shared their families' replies in the classroom and discussed these as a group.

Conclusions

Children were highly engaged in writing and grew in audience awareness, as evidenced in their messages and their behavior while composing. This engagement and growth seems to have been influenced by writing for real functions and an audience that would read, be truly informed or moved to action, and would respond. This study suggests that in early writing instruction,

a focus on function and audience might be as important as self-selection and teaching the steps in the writing process. Function and audience were key to motivating children to express their ideas effectively, and to developing awareness of writings' purposes and of the rhetorical and conventional strategies and constraints involved in writing for readers.

The case of Family Message Journals also suggests the importance of instructional guidance, and shows that explicit instruction **can** be provided without stripping children's writing of authenticity, purpose, and ownership. Both teachers **and** families helped the young writers move beyond what they were capable of on their own (Vygotsky, 1978). Their teachers required and taught children to write to their families for a variety of newly-introduced functions, with audience needs in mind. Family members' presence as intended readers in children's minds, as well as families' replies, guided the first-graders to write clearly, explicitly, engagingly, and conventionally in order to have the intended audience impact.

Focusing on only two classrooms of 24 children each, this study cites specific aspects of growth in children's functional writing as evidence of audience awareness. Further research is needed to determine if such growth would be manifested in other classrooms with similar function- and audience-focused instructional programs. Moreover, to control for developmental factors, we need comparative studies of classrooms where students write for assigned, real functions and audiences versus

classrooms where they write in a self-directed manner for themselves and classmates, with instruction limited to strategies for moving through writing process steps (Dahl & Farnan, 1998). The present study is suggestive; future research may help determine if writing for real functions and audiences makes a enough of a difference in literacy development to recommend rethinking how the writing process approach is commonly implemented in the primary-grades.

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Table 1

Functions of Children's Messages[1]

Function	Percentage of Messages	Example[2]
Inform families	50%	owls mite eat mice, fish, snakes, rabbits, and even skunks! Do you know why owl does not mind the smell of skunks? I do
Get things from families	12%	I want to get lots of books from the bookorder and I want to clean the dishes for you only if you pay me . . . how many will I get if you can buy me some I want too book sets
Interact with families	10%	You are the best dad in the world! You are Dinamic, brave, and funny.
Figure things out with families	10%	can Mrs. carolan pick up a cup without tuching it she could ty [tie] a Big not [knot] in The cup and put The not and put the string Threw The Top and pull The string.
Share personal ideas and feelings with families	8%	Field day was so much fun! . . . You came late and left erly I'm not happy about it.
Regulate families' behavior	6%	DON'T!!! drink alcohol befor driveing you Will get drunk and you might get in a car acksedent. Allways buckle Me up.
Create an imagined textual experience for families	4%	many years ago In a byuteeful medo ther was a mouse naemed gaby. the medo haed a streem the streem was Verea clean weth fish.

[1] Based on Halliday's (1975) category system.
[2] Examples represent only segments of complete messages.

Table 2

How Audience Awareness Was Manifested

Rhetorical Content

- Attention-getting questions and statements
- Responses to families' questions
- Embedded questions within messages
- Topical clarity
- Elaboration
- Evidence to support statements
- Persuasion techniques

Text-level Conventions

- Genre
- Format
- Handwriting

Sentence-level Conventions

- Punctuation
- Cohesion

Word-level Conventions

- Spelling

Table 3

Developing a Functional Perspective & Audience Awareness

What Teachers Did

Designed assignments

Provided direct instruction

1) Demonstration
2) Instructional tips
3) One-on-one feedback and challenge
4) Discussion of shared entries

What Families Did

Provided indirect instruction through replies

1) Indicating attention to and impact of messages
2) Requesting elaboration
3) Asking specific questions
4) Modeling elaboration